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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 004878

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TAGS: PREL MOPS IS LE TU

SUBJECT: TURKISH FM GUL'S VISIT TO ISRAEL - ISRAELI
AMBASSADOR STRESSES TURKISH PKO PARTICIPATION WELCOME

REF: ANKARA 04875

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson, reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

1.(C) Summary: Turkish FM Gul traveled to Israel August 20 for frank discussions with Israeli officials, who urged Turkey to participate in a Lebanon PKO, even to the extent of patrolling the Syria-Lebanon border to prevent arms smuggling. Gul expressed the concern that, while he understood Hizballah had provoked Israel, the way the war was prosecuted gained more adherents for Islamic extremism. Gul assured PM Olmert that Turkey will continue to be vigilant on Iranian overflights and offered to continue working for the release of Cpl. Shalit. Gul's visit to Israel seems to have restored a more healthy tonic to Turkish-Israeli relations despite the strains imposed by the Lebanon campaign. Indeed, the Turkish ambassador to Israel reportedly talked about an Olmert visit to Turkey in November. End summary.

¶2. (C) Gul's one-day trip included meetings with the Israeli DefMin, FM, PM, as well as side meetings with the families of the kidnapped Israeli soldiers. Gul/PM Erdogan advisor Ahmet Davutoglu had a separate meeting on his recent travels to Syria. A TGS general also accompanied the party and asked questions throughout on logistics of a possible UNIFIL deployment. Israeli Ambassador to Turkey Avivi, who sat in on the meetings, characterized the meetings as frank, tough, but very good. Gul's chemistry with FM Livni and PM Olmert in particular was excellent.

¶3. (C) Gul's major preoccupation was that Israel's effort to root out Hizballah could end up strengthening Islamic extremists. He said that everyone understood that Israel had been provoked. In the first days of the conflict that was acceptable, but Israel's overwhelming firepower, culminating in the destruction Gul saw on the ground in southern Beirut last week, caused even those who hated Hizballah to make common cause with them. A government like the GOT is trying to show that a modern, liberal, democratic system can function in this part of the world. Strengthening fundamentalists in the region runs counter to GOT goals.

¶4. (C) Despite the focus on Lebanon, Gul told his interlocutors that he believes the Palestinian problem remained the tougher one. He feared that the Lebanon campaign will feed extremism. Avivi said that Israel is focused on the probability that Palestinians in Gaza, having

seen the effectiveness of Hizballah rocket and anti-tank fire on Israel and Israeli forces, may now try to acquire such Iranian arms.

¶ 15. (C) The Israelis explained to Gul that they see two key locations for the expanded UNIFIL -- in southern Lebanon and on the Syrian-Lebanon border to prevent the infiltration of arms from Syria to Hizballah. Gul reiterated that Turkey is looking carefully at participation, but does not want to be in a combat role. The GOT also wants to be sure that its troops are really welcome and that UNIFIL has the support it needs to function properly. FM Livni told Gul that the GOI welcomes Turkish troops. She added that while she could not directly ask that the Turks patrol the Syrian-Lebanese border, the Israelis would be very pleased if that happens. Gul took the request on board.

¶ 16. (C) Israeli officials, including PM Olmert, asked Gul whether the Turks will continue to monitor Iranian overflights and, as needed, request that they land for inspection. Gul responded the Turks will continue to do so, though the information they had received so far had not been good (i.e., they had found nothing). Turkey, he assured Olmert, will continue to be vigilant in response to information received.

¶ 17. (C) Livni complained about PM Erdogan's "very tough, very one-sided reaction" to the Lebanon campaign and thanked Gul for Turkish MFA efforts to moderate the message and mitigate anti-Semitism and anti-Israel attitudes in Turkey. On anti-Semitism, Gul responded that one-sided newspaper coverage of the conflict had fanned the fires. In a country like Turkey, whenever people see young Islamic children

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dying, it touches the hearts of all. He stressed that the one-sided coverage had not been manipulated. (Comment: Newspapers across the spectrum, as well as TV, carried particularly gruesome pictures of dead children during the conflict. But the GOT did nothing to point out Hizballah's role. End comment.)

¶ 18. (C) The Israelis stressed that Israel's goal is to have Lebanon a fully sovereign state, in control of all its territory. Hizballah, they told Gul, is not a local militia, but is armed and directed by Iran. The funding and arms flow from Iran through Syria -- both of which border Turkey -- to Hizballah. This, as Iran's nuclear ambitions, will eventually pose a danger to Turkey, much as it does to Israel. Gul accepted this, Avivi said, but did not comment.

¶ 19. (C) There were some recriminations about Sgt. Galit. Gul regretted that GOT efforts to help with the first kidnapped soldier were rejected by Israel. He offered the GOT's continued good offices and indicated several times that they continue to try to engineer Shalit's release through various contacts with Syria and Hamas. Ambassador Avivi believed that Gul elaborated on this further in a one-on-one with Olmert, but had gotten no report from the Israeli PM. Israel, Avivi said, carefully did not send any message for Gul to take to Damascus, though the Turks apparently tried to elicit one. Avivi also noted a split within Israel on whether or not to try to engage Syria in order to try to split it from partnership with Iran. In his personal view, the moment for any such engagement had passed several years ago.

¶ 10. (C) Avivi heard from the Turkish Ambassador to Israel that PM Olmert had been invited to Turkey for bilateral meetings in November, to coincide with the World Economic Forum in Istanbul. This was noteworthy in light of the hard anti-Israel line PM Erdogan had taken during the conflict, and he had yet to confirm it. Gul and his party reportedly said nothing about this.

¶ 11. (C) Gul also met with Abu Mazen. Avivi said that, while

the GOI had sent no messages for Damascus, they had sent many for the Palestinian president, including pledges to work with him and avoid taking steps that could undermine him.

¶12. (C) In a separate conversation, Turkish MFA Deputy U/S (Middle East) Uzumcu told us that Gul complained that the unilateral and disproportionate use of force would in no way contribute to a permanent settlement of problems in the region. He said the Israelis made clear their wish to see Turkey in UNIFIL-plus; they said they trust Turkey and believe its capable armed forces will make a difference -- including to make this kind of UN force that Israel has traditionally been skeptical of a success. Olmert reportedly surprised the Turks by looking for 2000-3000 Turkish forces for Lebanon.

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